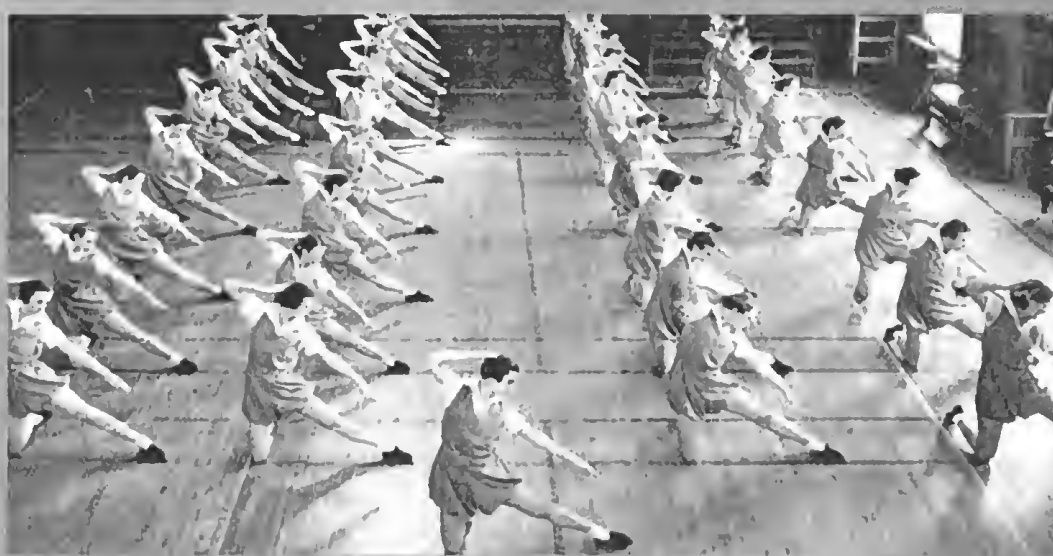


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L'ASSOCIATION CANADIENNE POUR LA SANTÉ, L'ÉDUCATION PHYSIQUE ET LE LOISIR

Place R. Tait McKenzie
1600 prom. James Naismith Drive
Gloucester, Ontario
K1B 5N4
Tel: (613) 748-5622
Fax: (613) 748-5737

President/Président
Dan Cooney, M.Sc.

Executive Director/Directrice administrative
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Vice-président des communications
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Why physical educators should know about

The Margaret Eaton School

By John Byl



John Byl, M.H.K., Ph.D. completed a doctoral dissertation at the State University of New York on "The Margaret Eaton School," and is an

Assistant Professor of Physical Education at Redeemer College. He has taught in high schools in Ontario and British Columbia.

FEW PEOPLE TODAY ARE aware of the Margaret Eaton School's important role in Canadian physical education. The Margaret Eaton School (MES) was the birth place of the forerunner of CAHPER, the Canadian Physical Education Association (CPEA), 60 years ago. The school, established as a result of the financial contributions of Margaret Eaton, provided more than 250 women with a comprehensive program in physical education teacher training. MES held its final graduation

on May 22, 1942, when it merged with the University of Toronto and encouraged the development of Canada's first bachelor's degree program in physical education. The development of physical education in Canada, particularly for women, as well as the formation of CPEA, were in no small part due to people involved with the Margaret Eaton School.

MES was one of Canada's first programs for preparing physical education teachers. The first program was the short-lived Y.M.C.A.'s Hamilton

School of Physical Culture: 1899-1913. The University of Toronto followed in 1900 with a diploma course for gymnastics and physical drill for men in 1900; a women's course was added in 1901. This program was not well received, and few graduated from it. A third diploma course in physical education was begun by MES. During its 41-year history, 1901-1942, MES offered one- to three-year diplomas in physical education. In 1941, MES amalgamated with the University of Toronto and the nation's first program toward a bachelor's degree in physical education was established. A fourth diploma course was offered in 1919 at McGill University.

MES began with Emma Scott Raff in 1901, in Toronto, as "The School of Expression," in a small room above some offices. One of the first students was Margaret Eaton, who played a significant role in the future of the school as a wealthy benefactor. It was due to her generosity that MES changed from one of several small and insignificant schools of expression to a more visible and long-lasting institution.

Because of overcrowding at the previous facility, the school moved to new quarters in 1906. Timothy Eaton, the founder of the Eaton Company, provided his wife with the money to pay for the new building and its contents. In honour of his wife, he agreed that it be named the Margaret Eaton School of Literature and Expression.

By 1915, the curriculum had shifted to embrace two distinct departments, namely, dramatic art and physical education. The Department of Dramatic Art was disbanded in 1926, since too few students enrolled in it. In 1941, Somers felt that a degree was essential to many positions in physical education and encouraged the school's merger with the University of Toronto.

MES faculty and student body consisted mostly of women. The school provided an opportunity for women to teach women; some of its graduates taught full-time and many others part-time. Especially noteworthy among the faculty are the school's three principals: Emma Scott Raff, MES's

founder; Mary Hamilton, who promoted physical education as well as camping through Camp Tanamakoon; and Florence Somers, who guided MES through its profitable final years and eventual amalgamation with the University of Toronto. The full-time students were all women.

Interviews revealed that most of the graduates worked for five years before they married, while 15 percent remained single and pursued their careers, and many others resumed their careers when their children had grown up. They secured teaching positions in private girls' schools, colleges and universities; obtained directorships in most of Canada's YWCAs; or served many settlements and summer camps. Graduates took their work seriously, regularly upgrading themselves at various summer schools and even during Christmas break with refresher courses offered by MES.

Three notable MES teachers

Mary Hamilton, a devout Christian woman, directed MES's physical education program from 1910 to 1934 and served as the school's principal from 1926 to 1934. She remained single all her life; lived many years in student residences; taught at Branksome and Bishop Strachan, private Toronto girls' schools; began a girls camp, Camp Tanamakoon; and through MES and her camp, began the first Canadian training program for women camp counsellors. In addition to hosting the founding meeting of CPEA, Mary Hamilton served as one of the three first vice-presidents. She began her term when the CPEA was formed, and retained this position 'til her retirement from MES in 1935.

Prior to coming to MES in 1934, Florence Somers worked as Associate Director of the Sargent School and Assistant Director in the Massa-

chusetts Department of Education. In 1935, Somers was selected as CPEA's first treasurer, and from 1939 to 1941, she served as CPEA's second president and the first woman president appointed to that position. During the war years she encouraged CPEA members to use their skills to assist in the war effort and to advance the importance of physical education. Somers concluded her presidency in 1942.

Although unmarried, Somers described her relationship with CPEA as that of a mother and a child, and recognized some stereotypical strengths and weakness of such a relationship. She wrote in 1942: "For the last three years the child has had a little mothering. Now that he approaches adolescence and must stand on his own feet among the big boys of the neighbourhood, it seems wise and desirable that he should be turned over to the male member of the family for more severe training."

Somers gave talks, wrote articles



Florence A. Somers

Her philosophy was one of encouraging "femininity and . . . a zest for action . . ."

and published a book in entitled *Principles of Women's Athletics*. She was an active member of various associations for women physical educators, as well as of organizations such as the Canadian Camping Association. She received the Honour Award of the American Physical Education Association in 1940.

Her philosophy was one of encouraging "femininity and charm and withal a zest for action and a vital personality which is the reflection of a love for activity." (Somers, *M.E.S. Magazine*, 1935-1936) These thoughts



MES Reunion, May 21, 1992, Redeemer College, Ancaster, Ontario. Left to right standing: Nora Gauld Wistow ('34), Helen Hurd Vizely ('36), Jean Meridith Burke ('40), Elizabeth Pitt Barron ('25), Pauline Sellar Hill ('42), Eleanor Keyes Kay ('36), Patty Sterne Sanders ('39), Dorothy Laidlaw Corlett ('39), Ruth Scott Prophet ('42), Kay Greene Green ('29). Left to right sitting: Dorothy Leggett ('40), Peggy May Ruddick ('40), June Kennedy Labbett ('41), Blanche Wellman Lynn ('41)

are further developed in her book and in an article to the *CPEA Bulletin* in which she outlines the "Ideals for Girls' Athletics." In this article, she expressed her concerns about women's so-called "frailty," about women being discussed and viewed for their appearance and not their skill, and about the dangers inherent in awards, money and men coaches, who encourage a woman to "push herself past the point of fatigue, or [playing] when not in condition to do so." (BCPEA, 1936a) Doctor Blumenfeld, a physician with Montreal's Health Department, challenged these positions, but Somers would not budge.

To her students, she was affectionately known as "Fliss." Most students found she had high expectations, was intellectually stimulating, fair, helpful, understanding and an "outstanding woman in her field." She practised relaxation techniques, and "valued good posture." Somers died on June 18, 1977.

Another woman who had considerable impact was Dorothy Jackson.

Following her graduation from MES, she became Director of Health Education at the Winnipeg Y.W.C.A., and Vice President of the Manitoba Physical Education Association. She joined the MES faculty in 1933, and continued her studies at the University of Manitoba, at Wisconsin, Toronto, and the Medau School in Germany, graduating with an M.A. from the State University of New York. In 1940 she was appointed the CPEA's new chairman of the Women's Athletic Section for Canada, succeeding Dorothy Tingley. "One of her first tasks on this committee was the development, distribution and analysis of a questionnaire on women's basketball rules" (BCPEA, 1941a). Her position on women athletes was similar to that held by Somers, and she encouraged women to officiate and to use women's rules.

Jackson's students described her as active, enthusiastic and exact, "you did things right or you didn't do them," therefore, "she got the very best out of you." As a consequence she was sometimes considered to be

a rather harsh task-master.

At the University of Toronto, Jackson remained actively involved in the promotion of physical education for girls and women, in badminton, synchronized swimming, aquatics, basketball, and volleyball. From 1943 to 1946 she was Vice-President of CPEA. At the time of her death, on April 9, 1967, she was the Director of the Department of Athletics and Physical Education for Women at the University of Toronto.

MES and the Canadian Physical Education Association

MES was the location in which CPEA was given birth at a meeting on April 19, 1933 (BCPEA, 1933). Faculty and students of MES played an important role in the operations and committees of this association, wrote articles and book reviews for the *CPEA Bulletin*, and their names were often listed in connection with work they were doing or events they attended. Based on CPEA membership lists from 1933 to 1942, approximately 10 to 15 percent of the CPEA membership were MES faculty, students, or graduates.

Those who were involved took an active role. In 1937 CPEA decided to form three important "bodies who will consider problems connected with Girls and Women." Somers served on the four-member Advisory Board, Jackson and Anne MacLean ('29) served on the six member Committee on Athletics for Girls and Women, while Elizabeth Wardley and Joan List ('32) served on the Committee on Programs in Physical Education for Girls and Women (BCPEA, 1937).

Other MES graduates and faculty were involved in CPEA as members of the four- to six-member Legislative Council. Flora Musgrave ('28) and Leila Worthy ('24) were on the Council from the association's beginning in 1933 to 1935. Joan List ('32) was a member of this Council while she worked at the Halifax Y.W.C.A. Gertrude Moore represented British Columbia in 1938, New Brunswick in 1939, and British Columbia again in 1940.

In 1939, Jackson chaired a committee which was to produce a badminton guide for women. This was the first project sponsored by CPEA, and it was done cooperatively with the National Section of Women's Athletics of the A.A.H.P.E. & R. She and Marjorie Hillas from Columbia's Teachers' College collected and developed most of the material, and received some help from MES students.

MES faculty were active conference speakers and the *CPEA Bulletin* also reported on some of these presentations. At the Ontario Educational Association (OEA) Convention in 1934, Somers presented a "display and discussion on gymnastic costumes." In May of 1936, Somers gave instruction in folk dancing at the Y.W.C.A. refresher course held in conjunction with the Y's National Council (BCPEA, 1934, 1936). Mildred Wickson and Marion Hobday also led YWCA workshops and there were at least 16 out-of-town MES alumnae present coming from as far away as Victoria (BCPEA, 1936). Also described was Marion Hobday's work in modern dance at the Y's National Council (BCPEA, 1936), as well as at the OEA Convention. At this same convention, Dr. Edith Gordon, of the U. of T. and medical examiner for MES, gave a "demonstration of a posture examination of high school children." (BCPEA, 1937)

The work of several MES graduates was also considered to be of sufficient importance to be commented on in the *Bulletin*. For example: Mildred Wickson's ('27) tap dancing instruction at the Y.W.C.A. Refresher course, Nora Gauld's ('34) gymnastic workshop, and Helen Patterson's ('30) workshop on "New Relay and Group Games," at the OEA Convention (BCPEA, 1937). The *Bulletin* reported that Gertrude Moore gave instruction at the University of British Columbia ('15), Mary Barker ('25) at the University of Western Ontario, and McQueen's ('23), at the Ontario Agricultural College, Guelph, and at Western (BCPEA, 1938, 1941b). Della MacFarlane's ('35) work as Physical Director of the New Brunswick

Normal School and supervisor of the physical activities of the Provincial Youth Training programs were also reported (BCPEA, 1940b, 1940).

As an example and incentive for professional development, there were

Its program was the most demanding in Canada.

several reports in the *Bulletin* of MES faculty and students who took extra courses. The *Bulletin* further reported on various Holiday Refresher Courses at MES, as well as the eventual merger of MES with the University of Toronto.

Clearly, the Margaret Eaton School contributed positively to the field of physical education and the CPEA, and its faculty and students were to be emulated. MES provided one of the first and, until 1941, the most comprehensive program of instruction for those interested in teaching physical education, particularly women physical educators. MES's role is all the more important because it developed during the formative period of physical education in Canada. In physical education at that time, its program was the most demanding in Canada, and it took an early lead in camp education. MES was also one of the first institutions to provide organized recreation for women in Toronto. The success of its many graduates, particularly in the final period, is notable. The school's impact was most evident in Canada's Y.W.C.A.s and private schools.

The school's importance was muted by Ontario's centralized and inflexible accreditation policy, which prevented MES graduates from taking their place in the physical education programs of the public schools without going to the Ontario College of Education. This was in spite of the fact that MES offered a more comprehensive program in physical education than the Ontario College of Education.

The beginning of the University of Toronto's bachelor's degree course in physical education would not have

begun as well as it did, without the resources – faculty, students, building, and library – MES offered the university in their merger. Finally, Mary Hamilton and MES played a key role in the development of the CPEA. MES was host to CPEA's founding meeting. Faculty and students, most notably Mary Hamilton, Florence Somers, and Dorothy Jackson, held key positions on the CPEA executive, and contributed numerous articles and book reviews to the association's journal.

Helen Gurney considered MES as an important institution in the development of physical education in Canada (Gurney, *The CAHPER Story*, 1983, p. 4). Indeed it was! Fifty-one years after the doors have been closed and on the 60th anniversary of CAHPER, we would do well to remember the pioneering role of the Margaret Eaton School.

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